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2001HANOI00539 - UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 DS-00 FBIE-00  
UTED-00 VC-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 VCE-00 NSAE-00 TEST-00  
DSCC-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 /000W  
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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2182  
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 000539

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, EAP/RSP, EAP/EX

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [VM](#) [ASEAN](#) [ARF](#)

SUBJECT: DAS BOYCE MEETING WITH VICE FOREIGN MINISTER LE CONG PHUNG ON ARF AND ASEAN ISSUES

1. EAP DAS BOYCE MET FEBRUARY 28 WITH LE CONG PHUNG, VICE FOREIGN MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR ASEAN AFFAIRS, TO DISCUSS A RANGE OF ISSUES CONCERNING ASEAN AND THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (ARF). MFA ASEAN DEPARTMENT DEPUTY DIRECTORS PHAM HUU CHI AND TRAN NGOC AN, AND AMERICAS DEPARTMENT DEPUTY DOAN XUAN HUNG, SAT IN ON THE VIETNAMESE SIDE. EAP/RSP DIRECTOR JUDITH STROTZ AND EAP/RSP OFFICER DEAN YAP ACCOMPANIED BOYCE.

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INTERSESSIONAL SUPPORT GROUP PROCESS  
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2. DAS BOYCE SAID THAT IN THE U.S. VIEW THE ISG IS THE HEART OF THE ARF, WHERE THE INVISIBLE WORK GETS DONE THAT ENABLES VISIBLE PROGRESS. THE U.S. IS CONCERNED OVER LACK OF PROGRESS AT THE SEOUL ISG, ALONG WITH OTHER ARF MEMBERS, AND PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING TO HELP PROMOTE ISG EFFECTIVENESS:

-- MOVEMENT TO TOPIC-BASED DISCUSSIONS ON REGIONAL SECURITY, RATHER THAN SET PIECES FROM THE VARIOUS DELEGATIONS. OTHER ARF MEMBERS HAVE RESPONDED FAVORABLY TO THIS IDEA, AND IT WORKED WELL IN SINGAPORE. THE U.S. HOPES THE SEOUL ISG CAN BE ARRANGED THIS WAY.

-- CONTINUATION AT THE KL ISG OF THE VOLUNTARY BRIEFINGS HELD IN SEOUL. THE U.S. WOULD LIKE TO BRIEF THE ARF ON CINCPAC ADMIRAL BLAIR'S PROPOSAL FOR ENHANCED REGIONAL COOPERATION.

-- INCREASED TIME FOR THE DEFENSE OFFICIALS' MEETING.

-- BEEFING UP SUBSTANTIVE EXPERTISE AT THE EXPERTS' GROUP MEETING (EGM) FOLLOWING THE KL ISG, RATHER THAN LETTING THIS FORUM BECOME BOGGED DOWN BY GENERALISTS.

3. PHUNG DEFENDED THE SEOUL ISG AND SAID VIETNAM IS TRYING ITS BEST AS CHAIR TO MOVE THE ARF PROCESS FORWARD. HE RESISTED THE SUGGESTION OF TOPIC-BASED SECURITY DISCUSSIONS,  
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SAYING IT BREAKS WITH LONG-HELD PRECEDENT AND IS TOO CHAOTIC IN A FORUM WITH 23 MEMBERS. A SET AGENDA PROVIDES BETTER STRUCTURE FOR DISCUSSIONS. PHUNG WELCOMED THE IDEA OF CONTINUED VOLUNTARY BRIEFINGS, HOWEVER, AND SAID VIETNAM WILL NOTIFY ASEAN COUNTERPARTS TO LOOK FOR THE U.S. CONTRIBUTION, AND TO PREPARE ANY BRIEFINGS THEY MAY WANT TO PRESENT. THE ONLY STIPULATION IS THAT SUCH BRIEFINGS MUST BE RELEVANT TO THE ISG. PHUNG ALSO UNDERTOOK TO INSTRUCT EGM PARTICIPANTS TO FOCUS MORE ON CONCRETE ISSUES.

ARF WORKING PAPERS  
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4. PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY PRINCIPLES: DAS BOYCE EXPRESSED THE U.S. VIEW THAT FORWARD MOVEMENT ON THE DRAFT ARF WORKING PAPERS IS A KEY TO PROGRESS IN THE ARF. THE U.S. IS WILLING TO SEE THE PAPER ON PD PRINCIPLES PASSED AS IS, AS A "SNAPSHOT" OF CURRENT THINKING ON THE ISSUE. PHUNG RESPONDED THAT VIETNAM HAS CIRCULATED THE PAPER, BUT REACTIONS ARE NOT ALL YET IN. HE DID REMARK THAT ASEAN IS

"SERIOUSLY STUDYING" THIS PAPER, AND HOPES TO HAVE CONSENSUS BY KL.

15. ROLE OF THE ARF CHAIR: BOYCE SAID THE U.S. BELIEVES THE CHAIR NEEDS TO HAVE AN "EARLY WARNING" FUNCTION, THE ABILITY TO FLAG ISSUES WHICH NEED ATTENTION, AND AUTHORITY TO CONVENE MEETINGS IF NECESSARY AND IF GROUP CONSENSUS EXISTS. PHUNG WAS NON-COMMITTAL, NOTING ONLY THAT THE DRAFT PAPER WILL BE ON THE AGENDA AT THE KL ISG, AND DISCUSSION SHOULD BE ELEVATED TO THE SOM OR MINISTERIAL LEVEL IF NECESSARY.

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16. PHUNG EXPRESSED VIETNAM'S GREAT APPRECIATION FOR RECENT INVITATIONS TO VIETNAM AS THE ARF CHAIR TO ATTEND A PACOM LEGAL CONFERENCE AND UNDERTAKE REGIONAL FAMILIARIZATION TRAVEL (THE LATTER INVITATION INCLUDES BRUNEI, AS FUTURE ARF CHAIR). PHUNG SAID THE PACOM INVITATION WENT TO THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE FOR CONSIDERATION; IT WAS LIKELY THE MND WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RESPOND IN TIME TO ACCEPT THE INVITATION. VIETNAM WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO ATTEND IN ANY EVENT IN THE CAPACITY OF ARF CHAIR, AS THERE WAS NO PRECEDENT. THE REGIONAL TRAVEL INVITATION WILL BE AN ISSUE OF DISCUSSION AT THE MARCH ASEAN SOM IN HO CHI MINH CITY, ALTHOUGH PHUNG NOTED THAT VIETNAM'S REMAINING TIME AS ARF CHAIR IS SHORT.

17. EXPERTS AND EMINENT PERSONS REGISTER: DAS BOYCE EXPRESSED THE U.S. VIEW THAT THE EEP REGISTER SHOULD REPRESENT A PROBLEM-SOLVING GROUP, RATHER THAN JUST A RESEARCH BODY. HAVING THE SCOPE TO OFFER OPINIONS WOULD ATTRACT MORE TRUE EXPERTISE TO THE REGISTER, WHICH COULD BE A VALUABLE RESOURCE -- SUBJECT ALWAYS TO CONSENSUS -- TO AN EXPANDED ARF CHAIR.

18. PHUNG SAID THIS ISSUE NEEDS MORE DISCUSSION AMONGST ASEAN MEMBERS. IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE EEP GROUP TO PERFORM IN-DEPTH STUDIES AND OFFER NON-BINDING PROFESSIONAL ADVICE, ALTHOUGH ANY ACTIVITIES WOULD HAVE TO OBSERVE BASIC ASEAN PRINCIPLES OF RESPECT FOR SOVEREIGNTY AND NON-INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THE DRAFT PAPER ALSO

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NEEDS TO QUANTIFY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ARF MEMBERS. VIETNAM WOULD LIKE THIS PAPER DISCUSSED AT THE APRIL ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' RETREAT.

OTHER ARF ISSUES  
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19. PHUNG COMMENTED THAT VIETNAM IS WORKING NOW ON THE DRAFT CHAIR'S STATEMENT FOR THE JULY MINISTERIAL, AND WILL SEND IT OUT SOON FOR COMMENTS. VIETNAM PARTICULARLY WANTS SUGGESTIONS FROM THE MAJOR ARF PARTNERS, INCLUDING THE U.S., FOR THE MINISTERIAL AND BEYOND.

10. VIETNAM HAS HEARD THE CRITICISM, PHUNG CONTINUED, THAT THE ARF IS SLOWING UNDER ITS CHAIRMANSHIP. ALL ASEAN MEMBERS, VIETNAM INCLUDED, AGREE THAT THE ARF IS A SLOW-MOVING FORUM. VIETNAM VERY MUCH WANTS TO LEAVE ITS MARK AS ARF CHAIR, BUT IS CONSTRAINED IN PUSHING FORWARD BY THE ASEAN TRADITION OF WAITING FOR NEW MEMBERS AND THOSE UNPREPARED FOR NEXT STEPS. FOR THIS REASON, ALTHOUGH VIETNAM IS ACTIVELY ENCOURAGING PREPARATIONS FOR THE NEXT STAGE, CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES (CBMS) WILL REMAIN THE ARF'S MAIN THRUST FOR THE TIME BEING.

11. IN THIS VEIN, PHUNG BROUGHT UP THE ECONOMIC SECURITY SEMINAR INITIATIVE, ON WHICH A PAPER CIRCULATED AT THE SEOUL ISG. VIETNAM WANTS A CO-SPONSOR FOR THIS CBM, AND SOLICITS U.S. SUPPORT. THE MARCH SOM WILL DISCUSS THE TOPIC, AND VIETNAM WOULD TENTATIVELY LIKE TO SEE THE SEMINAR HAPPEN AT THE END OF 2001. DAS BOYCE PROMISED U.S. CONSIDERATION OF THE IDEA.

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12. BOYCE ASKED FOR PHUNG'S VIEWS ON DISCUSSIONS OVER THE SOUTH CHINA SEA CODE OF CONDUCT, AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE ARF COULD WORK. PHUNG SAID ONLY THAT "DIFFERENCES" REMAIN AMONGST THE ASEAN MEMBERS, AND THE GROUP NEEDS TIME TO REACH CONSENSUS. OF POSSIBLE NOTE, PHUNG SAID CHINA HAD PROPOSED A CHINA-VIETNAM-MALAYSIA MEETING TO DISCUSS OUTSTANDING ISSUES, BUT ASEAN BELIEVES INTERNAL GROUP CONSENSUS IS NECESSARY FIRST BEFORE ENGAGING WITH CHINA ON ANY OTHER BASIS.

ASEAN POST-MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE  
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13. PHUNG SAID VIETNAM IS ALSO MAKING PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASEAN PMC, AND IS SOLICITING THE VIEWS OF THE DIALOGUE

PARTNERS ON HOW TO MANAGE THE OVERLAP BETWEEN THE THE ASEAN MINISTERS' MEETING, THE ARF, THE PMC, AND APEC. QUNG EMPHASIZED THAT THE VIEWS OF MAJOR PARTNERS SUCH AS THE U.S. ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT. VIETNAM'S CURRENT VIEW IS THAT THE PMC SHOULD FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT, LEAVING POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES TO THE ARF.

14. BOYCE EXPRESSED U.S. RESERVATIONS OVER A CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT FOCUS IN THE PMC, AS THE LEVEL OF DETAIL ENTAILED IS NOT WELL SUITED TO DISCUSSION AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL AND OTHER MORE APPROPRIATE FORA ALREADY EXIST. BOYCE ALSO RAISED CONTINUED LEGAL CONSTRAINTS ON U.S. DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION WITH ASEAN, BECAUSE OF OUR POLICY CONCERNS OVER BURMA, AND SUGGESTED TOO HARD A FOCUS ON THIS TOPIC COULD AFFECT THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE MEETING. INSTEAD, THE U.S.

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BELIEVES THE PMC MAY BE A USEFUL VENUE FOR DISCUSSION OF TRANSNATIONAL AND EXTRA-REGIONAL ISSUES.

15. PHUNG UNDERTOOK TO PASS THESE VIEWS ON, AND COMMENTED THAT DISCUSSION OF EXTERNAL VIEWS COULD BE USEFUL. IN THE 10-PLUS-ONE MEETING IN PARTICULAR, HOWEVER, TIME IS LIMITED, AND NEEDS TO BE DEVOTED TO BILATERAL U.S.-ASEAN TIES. OVERALL, VIETNAM AND MOST OTHER ASEAN MEMBERS CONTINUE TO THINK DEVELOPMENT IS A GOOD TOPIC FOR THE PMC. PRESSED FOR FURTHER DETAIL ON DEVELOPMENT ISSUES VIETNAM PROPOSES FOR DISCUSSION, PHUNG OUTLINED THE FOLLOWING:

-- OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AS ASEAN FACES GLOBALIZATION, AND HOW TO MAKE THE BEST CHOICES.

-- NARROWING THE DEVELOPMENT GAP BETWEEN THE ASEAN OLD-TIMERS AND NEW-COMERS, AND BETWEEN ASEAN AND OTHER REGIONS.

-- HOW TO ATTRACT EXPANDED OUTSIDE INVESTMENT AND COOPERATION, BOTH BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL, INCLUDING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER.

PHUNG COMMENTED THAT THE POINT OF THESE DISCUSSIONS WOULD NOT BE TO REQUEST FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SO MUCH AS TO SOLICIT IDEAS FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS.

16. DAS BOYCE DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THIS MESSAGE BEFORE DEPARTING POST.

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HARTER

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